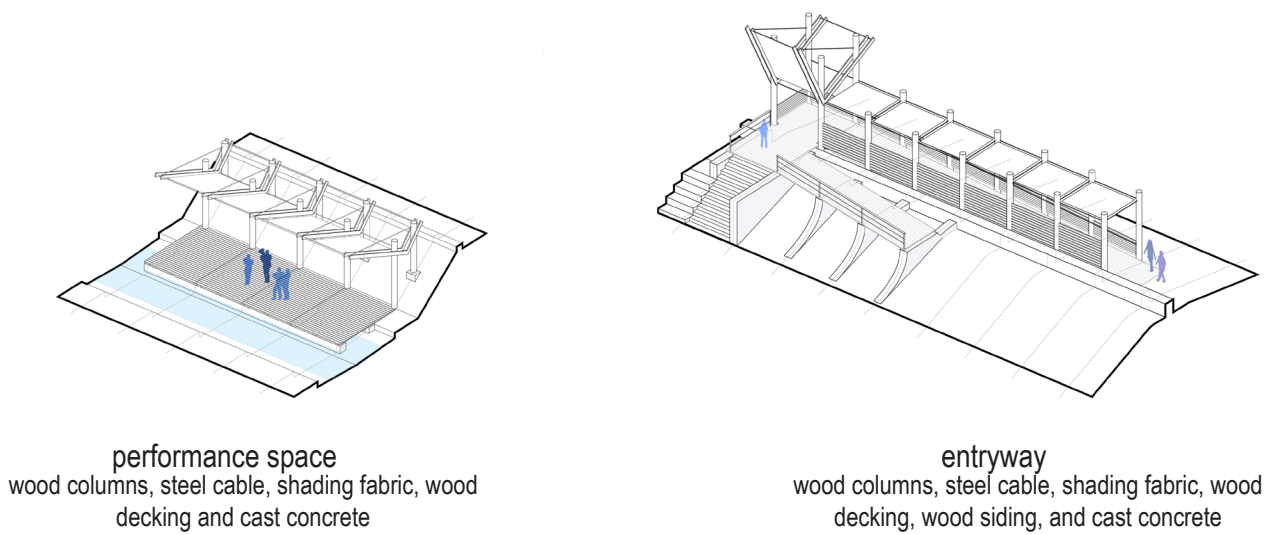
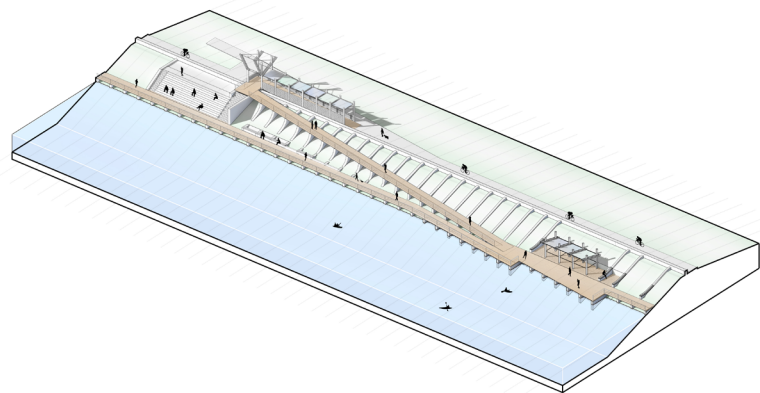
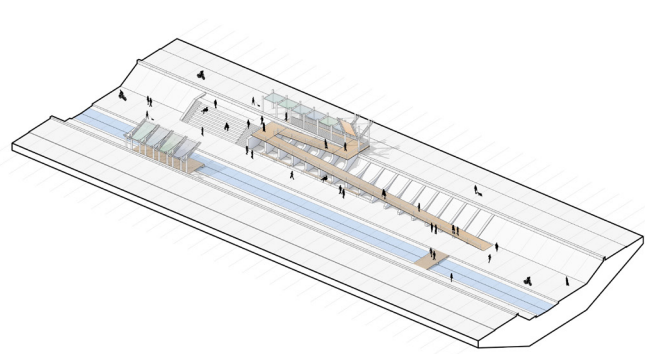
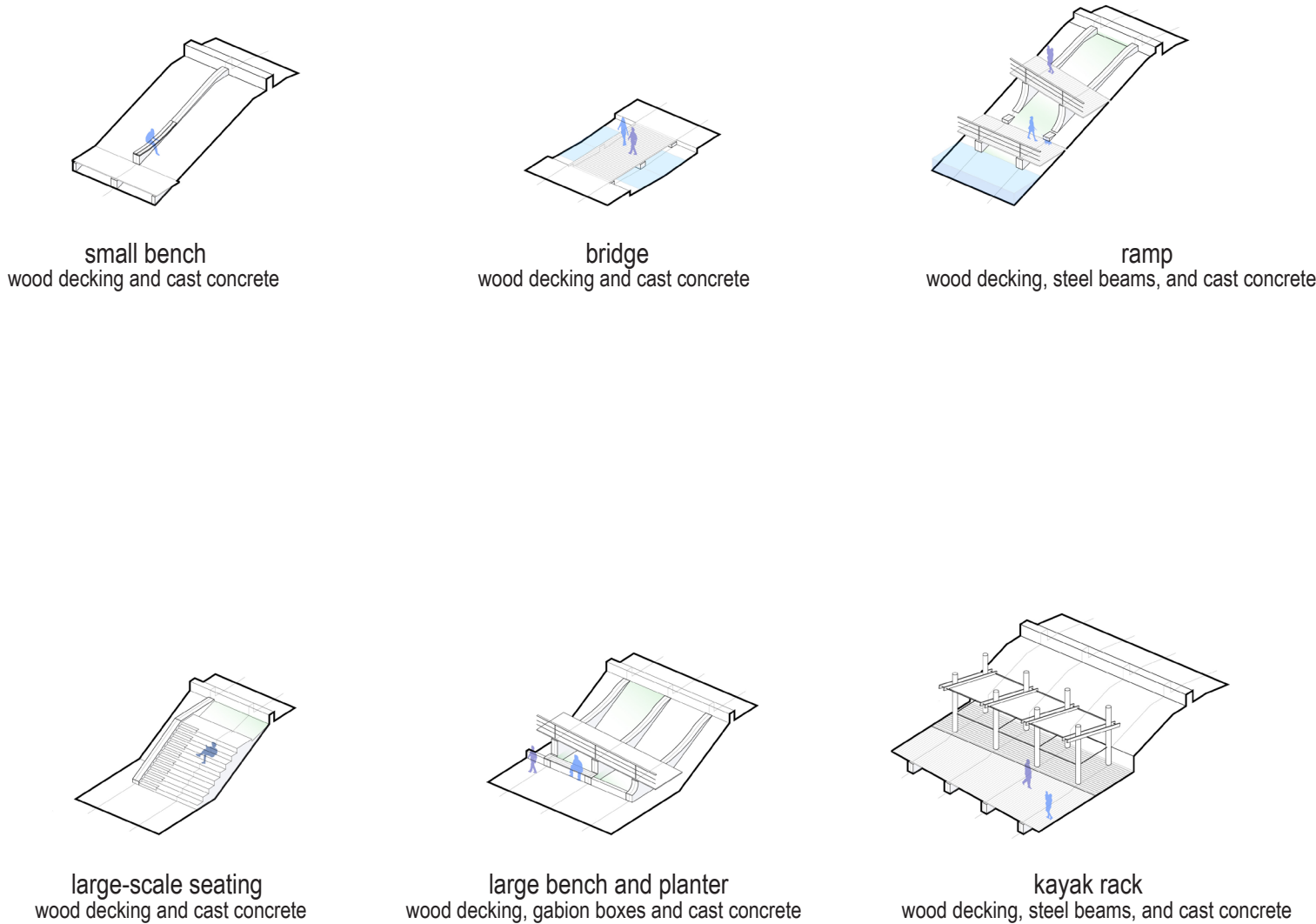




A walkable, bikable and boatable canal bed outside of Xavier University, useful for recreation in fair weather.



Proposed boat ramp and deck



The 17th Street Canal Walk

Reimagining New Orleans' infrastructural corridors

The canal network in New Orleans operates like an arroyo in the American Southwest. During periods of heavy rain, canals come to life with roiling waters and swept-up debris. Otherwise, these skeletal concrete corridors support tenuous emergent plant life and a constant, if lean, shelf of water. In an effort to promote this green growth, while pairing opportunities for urban hiking, skating and biking, canals could feature an elevated path and fissures for volunteer plants. Like a reverse NYC highline, this trail system could involve minimal initial infrastructure, starting with a series of stiles that would act as entry and egress points into the canal system, and then phasing in signage and mapping, an opensource guidebook, graffiti murals, aeries for birds, and finally, hardened infrastructure elements such as an elevated path.

One initial site for study is the 17th St. Canal system, the largest of three outfall canals in New Orleans. Along with the Washington-Palmetto line that feeds into it, the drainage corridor stretches more than six miles and connects Pump Station 1 at Broad St. to Pump Station 6 at the Parish line, and then pushes water out into Lake Pontchartrain. Conceived as a vital conduit for floodwater control, this long linear depression is ordinarily closed to other types of use. But this design proposal suggests another, synergistic future for the space— one in which humans, animals, and plants might also be given access to, and in turn enliven, the canal system.

This project is driven by the desire to find new opportunities for connecting people to their local hydrology. The 17th St. Canal is, at present, an example of an underused urban space that could be transformed to act as a recreational and ecological amenity. Perhaps more importantly, it has the potential to provide residents with a place to access and understand their watery native landscape. As the City of New Orleans has developed over the past 200 years, it has employed strategies of levee fortification, canal dredging, and pumping technology to detain and conceal both rain and floodwaters (Colten, 2009). Residents of New Orleans have witnessed the drawbacks of this invisible water management system in the city, most notably in terms of their own vulnerability and risk perception.

This new design thinking both recognizes water as a resource, and also employs urban landscapes to make it a more legible development force in the City of New Orleans. In service to these goals, older pumping infrastructure could be retrofitted for urban greenspace and recreation. As such, new water-positive efforts can emerge within functioning canals, without disrupting current floodwater management protocol. The modification of the 17th St. Canal for recreation is an opportunistic and affordable approach, meant to put people in touch with water processes. The pairing of hiking, biking, skating and boating with extant outflow corridors opens up new linear space for improved environmental, ecological and risk awareness.